BearPaw Legal Education & Resource Centre
NEWSWIRE

Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
April 29 – May 3, 2013

Urban aboriginals who follow traditional ways less likely to become drug addicts, study finds

Edmonton Journal
April 30, 2013
Marty Klinkenberg



A new study shows that urban natives who follow traditional practices are not only statistically less likely to struggle, but also seem to be better protected from negative influences, says University of Lethbridge professor's Cheryl Currie. File photo of a an event on the Enoch Cree Nation Reserve near Edmonton. Photograph by: Larry Wong, Larry Wong/Edmonton Journal/Post

EDMONTON - Aboriginals who embrace their culture while living in cities are less likely to suffer from drug addiction, says a study conducted by a University of Lethbridge professor.

Cheryl Currie's research published this week in the journal Social Science & Medicine, indicates urban natives who participate in traditional activities such as ceremonial dance, smudging and sweat-lodges have higher self-esteem and fewer problems with prescription medication and illicit drugs.

The findings are based on interviews in 2010 with 381 natives living in Edmonton, the city with the second-largest aboriginal population in Canada after Winnipeg.

"Aboriginal spiritual practices may provide a direct measure of protection against drug problems, given that they are often based on cultural teachings that promote abstinence from psychoactive substances or moderate use," the study says.

Beyond those teachings, traditional cultural involvement also opens up opportunities for urban aboriginals to interact and socialize with others who hold themselves and their ethnic ancestry in high esteem.

Traditional "activities may create a sufficiently intense collective life within the cityscape to provide a measure of protection from other forms of adversity," the study says.

A member of the faculty of health sciences in Lethbridge, Currie said previous research has focused on natives living in rural and remote areas. More than half of the native population in Canada now lives in an urban environment, however, and more than 60 per cent of aboriginals in Alberta live in cities, Currie said.

"Much of the risk study has being done on the reserves and because of that we know little about the health of natives in the cities," Currie said.

"There is a misperception that most aboriginals live on the reserves and that those living in the cities don't practice native culture, and it isn't true."

Adam North Peigan, executive director of the Edmonton-based Canadian Native Friendship Centre, isn't surprised by the study's findings.

He said natives migrate to big cities to escape poverty, addiction and abuse in their own communities.

"There are voids in people's lives, so they come to cities looking for a solution and a better way of life," Peigan said.

The Canadian Native Friendship Centre offers a variety of activities from powwow drum and dance nights to Cree language classes and Métis jigging and dance lessons to help people get in touch with their roots.

"I firmly believe this research study is right," Peigan said. "It is only when we are exposed and able to participate in our ceremonies will we be comfortable with who we are.

"What I find is that a lot of people are timid when they first come to activities here, but once they allow themselves to be part of the program, they are very proud. They walk away with their heads held high."

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Funding higher for aboriginal child welfare agencies since devolution: official

Winnipeg Free Press
April 30, 2013
Carol Sanders



Elsie Flette heads the Southern Authority child-welfare agency. (WINNIPEG FREE PRESS ARCHIVES)

Some aboriginal child welfare agencies in Manitoba have seen their funding double since the death of Phoenix Sinclair, a provincial inquiry heard today. Elsie Flette, who heads the Southern Authority, talked about changes affecting care for kids since devolution, when aboriginal organizations assumed authority for children in care, the vast majority of whom are aboriginal. Today, 89 per cent of the approximately 35 employees at the Southern Authority and 81 per cent of 600-plus workers at the child welfare agencies it oversees are aboriginal.

Phoenix died in 2005 when devolution was in its final stages. Winnipeg CFS closed her file without seeing her in March 2005 and she died that summer after moving to Fisher River First Nation with her mother and stepfather, who tortured and murdered her. Her death wasn't discovered until 2006 and an inquiry into her death ordered by the province began in September.

Flette, who's worked in child welfare for nearly 40 years, was part of the team that implemented devolution. Since then, a new federal-provincial funding formula agreed to in 2010 is helping the authority that oversees child welfare in 36 First Nations, including Fisher River, she said.

The old funding model it replaces was a "dog's breakfast," said Flette. "Every region was differently funded." The new funding model is more equitable, she said.

"Every agency has seen an increase," she said. The Southern Authority is receiving $60 million a year — a 49 per cent increase for the agencies it oversees, she said.

"Some had increases over 100 per cent," she said. Sagkeeng's child welfare funding rose 52 per cent and Peguis increased 89 per cent.

She couldn't say there are any fewer kids in care today, but said they have aboriginal workers looking out for aboriginal kids and trying to make the system more organized, accountable and less intimidating to the families it is supposed to help.

Aboriginal leaders of Québec and Labrador unite to protect the Ungava caribou



Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table meeting. (CNW Group/Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table)

KUUJJUAQ, QC and NAIN, NL, April 26, 2013 /CNW/ - It is with great pride that the Aboriginal governments and Nations of Québec and Labrador stand together and formerly announce the creation of the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table, a united and powerful voice that will endeavor to preserve caribou and the deep relationship that aboriginal people have long held with it.

Following an initial historic meeting in Kuujjuaq in January, the Inuit, Innu and Inuit/Métis living in Labrador as well as the Inuit, Innu, Naskapi and Cree living in Quebec gathered together again in Uashat mak Mani-Utenam last week to formalize the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table. The Round Table has been created to respond to the decline of the migratory caribou and will strive to develop a conservation and management system in a way that respects all cultures and traditions. This gathering is a strong step towards aboriginal leadership and responsibility towards the preservation of the land and animals on which they depend.

The Round Table has elected two Co-chairs, Ms. Sarah Leo, (Government of Nunatsiavut), and Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku, (Makivik Corporation) as well as an executive committee composed of representatives from each Nation namely Réal McKenzie (Innu of the Québec region), George Guanish (Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach), Todd Russell (NunatuKavut Community Council), Prote Poker (Innu Nation) and Isaac Masty (Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee/Cree Regional Authority (GCCEI/CRA) as well as the Co-chairs.

A technical Committee has also been assigned to support the activities of the Round Table and initiate the development of a Conservation Plan for the Ungava Caribou Herds including a process for recommending the sustainable sustenance and cultural allocation of caribou while respecting the sovereignty and independence of each member nation.

"The caribou has brought us together; we are united and committed to preserving caribou and our relationship with it for our present and future generations" says Sarah Leo, President of Nunatsiavut and co-chair of the Round Table.

As stated in the declaration (http://www.makivik.org/aboriginal-leaders-come-together-to-protect-the-george-river-and-leaf-river-caribou-herds/), caribou is central to the Aboriginal Peoples of the Ungava Peninsula. It is an integral part of the Aboriginal cultural, physical and spiritual well-being, as well as the food security of our nations. All members of the Round Table share deep respect and responsibility towards the caribou, and agreed that actions must be taken to respond to this critical decline of the George River Caribou Herd and the uncertain future of the Leaf River and Torngat Caribou Herds.

"The Round Table is a true testament of the respect for the individual realities and sovereignty of each participating aboriginal nations," says Adamie Delisle Alaku of the Makivik Corporation and co-chair of the Round Table. "I have great faith in the power of our unity, and that we will achieve our goal of preserving caribou while protecting our cultural well-being," he added.

About the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table
The Ungava Caribou Aboriginal Round Table membership is: the Inuit of Nunavik, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, the NunatuKavut Community Council, the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach, the Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee/Cree Regional Authority (GCCEI/CRA), the Innu Nation of Labrador and all the Innu communities from the Québec region. The Round Table will be developing a website in the near future.

Military parade, Prince Philip and descendants of First Nations warriors part of Battle of York anniversary ceremony

National Post
April 26, 2013
Natalie Alcoba



Aaron Lynett/National Post filesApril 27 marks the 200th anniversary of the Battle of York, a seminal moment in the history of what would become Canada.

When the sun rises on Toronto Saturday, it will be greeted by descendants of First Nations warriors who fought alongside British soldiers and local militiamen, 200 years ago to the day, at the Battle of York. The sunrise ceremony will kick off a day commemorating a seminal moment in the history of what would become Canada. York, as Toronto was known, would fall to invading American forces then, who occupied it for about six days, looting homes and torching the parliament buildings before turning back. The British would go on to rebuild Fort York and set the White House and the Capitol ablaze later in retaliation. If not the start, the Battle of York certainly solidified the "long tradition of defining ourselves by who we aren't" — American — said city historian Richard Gerrard. The Post's Natalie Alcoba explains the events.



"We lost five of our chiefs"

Charles Pachter/handoutChief Tecumseh

The sunrise ceremony will begin at 6 a.m. at the Palais Royale, not far from where American troops landed on April 27, 1813, and encountered First Nations warriors. Garry Sault, an Elder of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, will call on the ancestors "so that they

can witness that we're still doing what we're supposed to be doing on our traditional territory." The ceremony will happen around a fire pit and include the smudging of burned sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and cedar on those present. "We lost five of our chiefs," Mr. Sault said of the battle. In all, about 90 First Nations fought alongside the British army and the Upper Canadian militia. Their contributions will be remembered at an afternoon ceremony at the fort, where youngsters will sing O Canada in Ojibwa and a commemorative plaque will be unveiled. It will end with a round dance led by Elder Sault. "We have to instil in the people of Canada the contribution that the aboriginal people made to this great country," said Mr. Sault. "If we make enough of a showing, then maybe people will take notice."

Retracing footsteps

With as many as 50 first-person accounts to draw from, historians have been able to piece together what likely happened at the Battle of York. Mr. Gerrard will help narrate history on a walking tour starting at Palais Royale at 10 a.m., about an hour from the actual American invasion 200 years earlier. "It's one of those historical things where you are standing where it happened," said Mr. Gerrard. "It's actually kind of mind blowing." He dispels the notion that the Americans snuck up on York; the British had seen them the day before on the water. "What it was was a major invasion force," he said, with 14 vessels, 1,800 American soldiers and 800 marines that overwhelmed the 300 British soldiers, 300 Upper Canadian militia and allied First Nations. "The expression shock and awe would apply." The six-hour battle ended with the British blowing up a gunpowder magazine and retreating to Kingston. "It really was all hands on deck trying to defend this little community in a battle that, if you were a reasonable officer, never would have been fought," said Mr. Gerrard. All told, about 321 Americans and 201 British were killed, wounded or missing, but the numbers vary depending on historical account. (Mr. Gerrard's record, for example, has two First Nations warriors killed, and 7 wounded in action.)

A touch of royalty



Prince Philip

A "dynamic military display" will unfurl on the south lawn of Queen's Park at 9 a.m., followed at 10 by the presentation of a new regimental colour by His Royal Highness Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh, to the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment. The Prince has been colonel-in-chief — an honorary title often given to members of the Royal Family — of the regiment since 1953. Regimental colours are like a ceremonial flag that historically provided a rallying point for soldiers on a battlefield. A 21-gun salute will be part of the ceremony.

Five-kilometre parade at 11:30 a.m.

Billed as one of the largest military parades that Toronto has ever seen, 1,700 Canadian sailors and soldiers will march from Queen's Park, down University Avenue, across Richmond Street, south on Portland Street past the War of 1812 monument and culminating at the Fort York Armoury. The 5-kilometre route is meant to honour those who died in the Battle of York. The parade will include 13 marching bands, a 105mm Howitzer with artillery gun tractor and 12 horses with the Cavalry Troop of The Governor General's Horse Guards. "If you're standing at one point along the route it will take 40 minutes for the whole thing to go by you," said Captain Indira Thackorie, with the Canadian Forces. At Fort York, army equipment will be on display, including the new special engineering vehicle, a gun tractor for moving artillery, the armoured LAV II and Coyote surveillance that was used in Afghanistan among others.

Abused aboriginal children's archive of pain grows

The Star Phoenix
April 29, 2013
Christopher Curtis

Justice Murray Sinclair has travelled across Canada collecting nightmares for almost four years now.

The head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was tasked with recording the abuse thousands of aboriginal children suffered during their time in the country's residential school system. Wherever he travels, he carries a growing archive of pain with him. At each of the TRC's new destinations, there's a whole new universe of pain waiting for him and his fellow commissioners.

And yet the longtime Manitoba judge chooses to greet this pain with a smile. Throughout the commission's four-day stop in Montreal, Sinclair always had a comforting thought, a smile and a hug to offer the people who spoke out.

"The burdens the survivors share with us, they're not asking us to carry that weight for them," Sinclair told Postmedia News. "They're asking us to make sure that their stories are documented, are stored somewhere and made available for future generations."

Sinclair understands the role his commission has in helping survivors of the residential school system let go of the hurt they've kept inside for decades. The TRC

is set up in such a way that the survivors brave enough to relive their nightmarish childhoods can have access to psychological and spiritual healing.

But the judge emphasizes the TRC's larger mandate, which is to get Canadians talking about a subject that has been carefully avoided since the last residential school was closed in 1996.

"When we began our work as commissioners back in 2009, the most dominant question people would ask was 'Why were we never told about (residential schools)?'" he said. "And we can answer that why, but the response then becomes: Now that you know about it, what are you going to do about it?"

In July 2012, the commission met with education ministers to discuss teaching students about residential schools. So far, only the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have put the new teachings in place.

Representatives of the Parti Québécois government met with Sinclair during his brief stint in Montreal during a meeting the commissioner characterized as positive. "Quebec's aboriginal affairs minister told us there will be an aboriginal history month set aside in this province," Sinclair said. "That's huge for us."

As the commission moves toward its next national event in Vancouver in the fall, the herculean task of accumulating thousands of hours of testimony and millions of records from churches, the RCMP and the federal government continues. By the time their archiving is done, the TRC will build a national research centre so that Canadians can access the 150-year residential school saga in as much detail as possible.

The University of Manitoba appears to be the most realistic site for the research centre. Sinclair says the university has submitted a proposal and discussions about the project are nearly finalized.

The road ahead could prove difficult as the commission has already been at odds with the federal government over an apparent lack of funding and what the TRC's lawyer called "serious difficulty" obtaining crucial documents from Ottawa. So far, the feds have released 937,000 documents to the TRC, but millions of records are still sitting in archives across the country.

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UN report finds Canada not doing enough to stop violence against aboriginal women

Vancouver Sun
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Tiffany Crawford



Demonstrators rally in front of the missing women's monument on Jan. 3, 2010, in Vancouver's Crab Park. The activists were demonstrating to bring attention to the more than 500 aboriginal women missing across the country.
Photograph by: Ward Perrin, PNG Files, Postmedia News

Canada needs a national strategy to combat violence against indigenous women and girls, says a United Nations summary report on human rights.

The United Nations Human Rights Council has adopted the report on the Universal Periodic Review of Canada's human rights record, which included recommendations from several countries.

The report, released in Geneva today, summarizes Canada's UPR — a global accountability process that monitors a country's compliance with international human rights laws. All UN member countries undergo such a review every four years.

Recommendations included establishing a national centre for missing persons and unidentified remains, police task forces to investigate cases and community safe plans.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based watchdog, said the report shows the federal government has failed to adequately address the high number of murders and disappearances of aboriginals over the last four decades.

"It is not surprising that violence against indigenous women and girls figured so prominently in the discussion of Canada's human rights record," said Liesl Gerntholtz, women's rights director at Human Rights Watch, in a statement Tuesday.

"It reflects the persistent insecurity faced by women and girls, the urgent need for a public accounting of what has gone wrong for so long, and a robust national plan for addressing it going forward."

In response to the report, the federal government defended its record Tuesday, noting it has introduced legislation to try to ensure families on reserves have similar rights as other Canadians.

"The proposed legislation will address violence against individuals living on reserve, especially Aboriginal women and their children, by allowing courts emergency protection orders to remove a violent partner from the home," said Andrea Richer, press secretary to Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt.

A scathing report released in February by Human Rights Watch accused some police officers of harshly mistreating native women and girls in northern B.C.

That report contained unproven allegations by several northern B.C. women and girls who say they were abused physically or sexually by police.

In February, the federal government established an all-party committee in Canada's House of Commons to hold hearings on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and propose solutions to address root causes of violence.

Human Rights Watch said while the move is a step in the right directions, it is not a substitute for a national commission of inquiry with independent powers beyond those of a parliamentary committee.

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with files from Lori Culbert

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Evacuations on Poundmaker and Onion Lake Cree nations

The Star Phoenix
May 1, 2013
Janet French

Several dozen people have evacuated their homes on the Poundmaker Cree Nation and many more residents of the Onion Lake Cree Nation are preparing to escape flooding in west-central Saskatchewan.

Between 40 and 50 residents were evacuated and put up in hotels in Cut Knife, Paynton, and North Battleford, said Sherry Jimmy, director of operations for the Poundmaker Cree Nation.

"(Monday) morning it became apparent that there were people's houses that were becoming quickly surrounded by water," Jimmy said. "Efforts were made to relocate them immediately. The scope of the problem wasn't really realized until later in the afternoon, when it became apparent that we would have at least a dozen houses to evacuate."

The First Nation declared a state of emergency.

The water surged when the Cut Knife Creek peaked, Jimmy said, noting the nearby Battle River is also bringing more water to Pound-maker, and may result in another surge. Several basements were flooded on the reserve, but Jimmy didn't have a count late Tuesday afternoon.

On a Tuesday morning conference call, the province's commissioner of emergency management, Duane McKay, said emergency measures staff will be working with Poundmaker.

On Monday, water spilled onto Highway 40, closing that road into the reserve. Water was also flowing on the community's other access road, Highway 674.

"That was a bit unnerving as well, because we're trying to move people out, and we're moving them through roads that are flooded," Jimmy said.

Deanna Wysoskey, provincial co-ordinator of emergency social services, said those evacuated from Poundmaker are now registered with the Red Cross. Support will be provided for rooms and meals until the end of the week, she said. At that time, the province will revisit the situation.

Another snag came when an eight-metre section of riverbank collapsed on the weekend, exposing a water line and a gas line. The water line broke, interrupting service to some residents. The gas line stayed intact.

SaskEnergy spokesperson Dave Burdeniuk said although gas is still flowing to the reserve, an employee is on site monitoring the situation. If the riverbank continues to collapse, the utility will do an emergency shutoff and find another way to get gas into the reserve, Burdeniuk said.

The utility will design a permanent repair once runoff season is done, he said.

ONION LAKE PREPARES FOR LARGER EVACUATION

Officials on the Onion Lake Cree Nation worry the worst of their water woes are yet to come. The reserve, which straddles the Alberta-Saskatchewan border north of the City of Lloydminster, began watching water seep in last Thursday, said Clifton Okemaysim, assistant director of public works for Onion Lake.

Roads are washed out in at least six parts of the reserve, which is at the bottom of a large hill, the snow from which is trickling downhill into the community and flowing into Pipestone Creek, which travels through the middle of the First Nation.

The community evacuated one family to a hotel in Lloydminster before their house became completely inaccessible by road. Chief Wallace Fox said the reserve has bobcats and graders out attempting to shore up the affected roads.

Fox said the First Nation declared a state of emergency Monday afternoon. However, on Tuesday afternoon an official with the Ministry of Government Services said the province has yet to receive the paperwork for the declaration, which gives the community access to provincial help.

Okemaysim said the Water Security Agency of Saskatchewan has told the First Nation to expect even more water when the weather warms up later this week.

"With the major impact coming, we have other (evacuation) staging areas located here on the First Nation," Okemaysim said. "We've got a community hall, we've got the schools, the arena."

Okemaysim says up to 50 residences could be under threat from water. Fortunately, Onion Lake owns its own gravel business, and workers have been putting in long hours crushing gravel to build up roads.

The towns of Maidstone and Radisson, the village of Borden, the rural municipalities of Great Bend and Elfros have also declared states of emergency due to flooding.

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Aboriginal Affairs Minister Responds to AG

Net Newsledger
May 1, 2013
James Murray



The Aboriginal Affairs Minister responds to Auditor General's Report

OTTAWA – The Auditor General found concerns in the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Ministry. In the House of Commons, NDP Leader Thomas Muclair sought answers from Prime Minister Harper. "Five years after the residential schools apology, the Conservatives are not taking this and many other matters seriously. A number of departments are still refusing to provide the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with important documents related to the residential schools. Today, the Auditor General strongly condemned this lack of co-operation. The commission's mandate will come to an end in 15 months. Will the Prime Minister commit today, here in the House, to immediately hand over these documents?

The Prime Minister responded, "In 2008, I made a historic apology concerning residential schools on behalf of all Canadians. To date, federal departments have handed over more than 3.5 million documents to the commission. The process is ongoing and the government will continue to give documents to the commission.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Statement

Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, issued the following statement today in response to the release of the Office of the Auditor General's report:

"The Government of Canada is committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools. That is why the Prime Minister made an historic apology on behalf of all Canadians in 2008, and it is why, to date, we have provided over 3.5 million documents to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). All of these documents have been digitally scanned and provided to the TRC in electronic format to aid in the creation of a permanent historical record of the residential schools legacy for current and future generations of Canadians.

"Last week, on the occasion of the TRC's national event in Montreal, I met with the TRCCommissioners and reaffirmed our government's commitment to reconciliation between Aboriginal people, their families and all Canadians, and to working with the TRC to fulfill Canada's obligations under the Indian Residential

Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). I also had the honour of meeting with a group of residential school survivors and youth, and had the opportunity to tour the Learning Place to learn more about Quebec's residential schools and the effect they had on the lives of Aboriginal children.

"The report released today by the Office of the Auditor General acknowledges some of the steps that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has taken to fulfill its obligations under the IRSSA.

"We agree with the Auditor General that Canada and the TRC can work more closely together to ensure the objectives of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement are met, and we are working jointly with the Commission to develop a project plan to fulfill document disclosure requirements.

"I also extended to the TRC an invitation to participate in a focused education consultation so that the government's proposed education legislation benefits from the insights gleaned by the Commission through its hearings across Canada.

Our government has been, and will continue to be, guided by the principle that working together is the best way to achieve the healing and reconciliation that the implementation of the IRSSA is intended to achieve. This is a goal I know is shared by the TRC and I look forward to our next meeting so that we can build on our discussion last week as we work toward this important objective."

Researchers warn of uprising if first nations not involved in resource development

Vancouver Sun
May 1, 2013
Peter O'Neil



Drummers perform a song, January 28th, during the Idle No More rally outside the Aboriginal Affairs office on Vancouver's Melville street. Photograph by: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun

OTTAWA - Canada faces a "catastrophic" aboriginal uprising unless first nations approve of, and have full participation in, major natural resource developments, according to two research papers made public Wednesday by a prominent think-tank.

The stark warning of future violence comes from former Canadian senior military officer Douglas Bland, now professor emeritus at Queen's University in Kingston.

He argues in an essay published by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute that Canadians should take heed of the Idle No More movement that triggered cross-Canada protests earlier this year.

"An idea that most Canadians would have seen as preposterous a year ago…is now very real," Bland writes.

"The possibility of a catastrophic confrontation between Canada's settler and aboriginal communities, spurred not by yesterday's grievances but by the central features and consequences of our national policies, have the potential to make such an uprising feasible if not, one hopes, inevitable."

Bland said major Canadian transportation arteries, ports and pipelines are vulnerable.

A separate paper by the institute argues, however, that Canada can avoid confrontation by making sure that aboriginal Canadians get job training and other opportunities to profit from natural resource projects like Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline to the B.C. coast.

The authors suggest that other provincial governments emulate B.C.'s practice of ensuring that first nations get a direct share of wealth from forestry and mining projects.

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Aboriginal leaders urging voter engagement in B.C. election

Globe and Mail
April 30, 2013
Mark Hume

With new oil pipelines, tanker routes, LNG plants, mines and hydro-power projects proposed throughout British Columbia, aboriginal leaders are telling people in their communities to get out and vote, because their future is at stake.

For the most part, native leaders are not advising community members on whom to vote for – they say that would be considered disrespectful – but they are urging people to get involved in the political process and to take a hard look at the party platforms.



The leaders, from left: Adrian Dix of the B.C. New Democrats, Jane Sterk of the B.C. Green Party, Christy Clark of the B.C. Liberal Party, John Cummins of the B.C. Conservatives.

What follows are the views of four B.C. native leaders, condensed and edited from interviews:

Art Sterritt, executive director, Coastal First Nations

I think the Enbridge project is huge. Certainly in the North all through the area where Northern Gateway has been proposed, it's issue No. 1. We're not saying which party to vote for, but if people are looking at one party that is hedging their bets and setting the table for approval of Northern Gateway and another one saying they are going to stop it, you've got a pretty clear choice.

On top of the Enbridge pipeline, we also have something that's maybe even bigger and that's the LNG projects that are being proposed. We are talking literally thousands of ships that are being proposed to go up and down the coast.

I don't think the parties have distinguished themselves clearly on that issue yet, although the sitting government has made life pretty tough for us. We thought at one point in time LNG would be assessed in an environmentally sound way.

But with a government declaration that LNG is "a clean source of energy" it's really upset the apple cart, because it assumes the projects are all environmentally sound as a starting point.

One thing that is clear is that Northern Gateway has rallied native communities like I haven't seen in 30 years and that should motivate people to get out and vote. The parties have realized that, but have different approaches.

The NDP guys are meeting with local people in different regions, trying to find out what the local issues are. I see the Liberals running around making the old-style election promises and giving handouts. But I see the NDP running around talking to

people, trying to figure out where people want to go. They are trying to be more engaging.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs

There's no doubt the issue of unresolved aboriginal title in B.C. continues to be the major outstanding issue between ourselves and any provincial government that may be in power.

It's clearly evident that the B.C. Liberals under the leadership of Premier Christy Clark have been very distant and non-committal in terms of engaging the First Nations in the province. Former Liberal premier Gordon Campbell made a significant commitment through the 'new relationship' [policy initiative] to engage on that very issue, but when Premier Clark assumed leadership of the B.C. Liberals, the relationship between the First Nations leadership council and the provincial government was put on the back burner.

The NDP appear to be making more of an effort. I believe they understand that it's a fundamental issue that stands in the way of economic certainty in the province. Clearly the Northern Gateway pipeline proposal, the Kinder Morgan pipeline proposal, the new Prosperity mine, the Site C dam proposal, the fracking issue in the Northeast, the Jumbo ski resort are all prime examples of the consequences of governments not engaging the unresolved aboriginal title issue in British Columbia.

These are issues that should get people out to vote. I think more of the younger generation are inclined to engage in the democratic process in terms of voting. And I'm convinced that trend will continue during this election. More and more of our people will not only vote, but I think some of our young people will involve themselves in campaigns and work as volunteers.

Grand Chief Doug Kelly, president, Sto:lo Tribal Council

The unresolved land question and resource development are the big issues. Those would be key things and the next government, if they are serious about treaty negotiations, they are going to have to revisit the treaty mandates, because they are entirely inadequate. So that's an area of concern.

Secondly is environment, coupled with a duty to consult and accommodate.

First Nations leaders, First Nations citizens, are not against development. What they are concerned about is conducting development in a sustainable fashion.

I think under Gordon Campbell the B.C. Liberals were making an effort on the 'new relationship.' I'm not sure that has been sustained with the change in leadership. I think there are concerns the B.C. Liberals haven't followed through. I know Adrian

Dix as Leader of the Opposition has been meeting with many chiefs, talking about issues, talking about the kinds of things that are important to First Nations. And I'm quite sure the B.C. Liberals will be doing so, too.

You can't make a blanket statement about whether or not native communities will get out to vote. There are differences across the province. I know from my own community we get a fairly good turnout every election. But there are parts of the province where chiefs, leaders and citizens don't get as actively involved in elections – and I think they should. These decisions are important and I think we need to be heard. I'm always encouraging First Nations leaders to get informed, to get to know the candidates, to get to know the platforms and to push to make sure our issues are a point of debate and a point of discussion during the election.

Jody Wilson-Raybould, regional chief, B.C. Assembly of First Nations

When you talk about big issues, certainly top of the list and I think this goes beyond being an indigenous issue, are the major industrial resource developments that are taking place in our territories. First Nations have been speaking out quite loudly about those projects.

There's been a lot of chatter about whether those issues will inspire people to get out and vote. I think that we are challenged with community engagement in some places, but that's changing because there is a tangible impact on our territories with these various projects. And people see that.

I know the NDP through their Leader Adrian Dix have visited some of our provincial assemblies and as a leadership council we have had a meeting with him and several of his advisers on the aboriginal file. We've also continued to meet with provincial government representatives, including the Premier, but it's no secret we've had challenges ensuring there is a good relationship with the provincial government.

When it comes to advising communities how to vote, our approach is to provide the information that we are able to glean from our meetings with various non-aboriginal government leaders. We provide that to our constituents – but we certainly recognize that there's diversity in our province and each individual leader and citizen will make up their own mind.

First Nation pressed for financial reports during suicide crisis: Neskantaga worries crisis will lead to imposition of outside financial management

CBC News
May 1, 2013
Jody Porter



The state of emergency in Neskantaga prompted daily conference calls with officials from all levels of government. Emergency response co-ordinator Chris Moonias (left), Chief Peter Moonias (centre) and Matawa CEO David Paul Achneepineskum (right) took the call from the band office last week. (Jody Porter/CBC)

A small First Nation in northern Ontario is concerned its suicide crisis is turning into a financial crisis for the community.

Neskantaga First Nation declared a state of emergency April 17 after two young men committed suicide within days of each other. Leaders say, on average, 10 people have attempted suicide every month since the beginning of the year.



Neskantaga band councillor Roy Moonias says Aboriginal Affairs is refusing to provide any additional funds for the suicide crisis until backlogged financial reports are filed. (Jody Porter/CBC)

But help has been slow in coming to the First Nation and the band council now fears its finances are under increased scrutiny by the government and spiralling out of control.

Councillor Roy Moonias said last week that Aboriginal Affairs was not releasing any additional funding to deal with the crisis until outstanding financial reports were complete.

After seven tragic deaths in 10 months, most administrators in Neskantaga are off on bereavement leave and there is little capacity in the First Nation to complete the reporting.

- WATCH: Ontario First Nation gets little help for suicide crisis
- LISTEN: A community at a breaking point
- READ: Suicide prompts First Nation to declare state of emergency

"We can't think, we can't function, we can't do some of the paperwork because we're busy dealing with other stuff...dealing with lives," emergency response coordinator Chris Moonias shouted during a conference call with Aboriginal Affairs representatives last week.

"That's why we're asking you -- help," he added. "If you don't understand it, come to the community and see for yourself. When you tell me to write a report about it, that's b.s."

Neskantaga First Nation is currently in a co-management position with Aboriginal Affairs. That means an accountant in Thunder Bay is helping the community manage its government funding, but the First Nation still has some say in how it is spent.

But the band council is afraid Aboriginal Affairs is using the current crisis to leverage backlogged financial reports. They fear that will land it in third-party management, where the council would have little say in how any money is spent.



There is no road to Neskantaga, so any support or supplies coming to the community must travel by plane, adding to the cost. (Jody Porter/CBC)

Chief Peter Moonias said Neskantaga would not be in such a difficult position if it received adequate funding in the first place.

"That's why our books don't sit well with anybody with the government," he said. "We're very much underfunded in every program we have."

In response to questions from CBC News, Aboriginal Affairs said it will continue to flow funding for essential programs in Neskantaga during its state of emergency.

But a spokesperson did not answer CBC's question about the possibility a third-party manager would be imposed.

In a written statement, Linda Britt said only that the department will "continue working closely with our federal, provincial and First Nation partners to help ensure the safety of the community and its members."

Idle No More gets out of the courts and into the streets: Nationwide campaign urges grassroots organizations to engage in direct action in their communities

Vancouver Observer
April 30, 2013
Erin Flegg



Shell oil drum via O.F.E. and Flickr.

After years of attempting to fight for their rights through the Canadian legal system, First Nations across the country are denouncing the courts in favour of a season of direct action.

Idle No More and Defenders of the Land have partnered to spearhead the Summer of Sovereignty, a campaign designed to encourage direct action and civil disobedience at the grassroots level

The kick-off comes on the heels of another failed court challenge, this time a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada not to hear the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation's constitutional challenge of Shell Oil's Jackpine Mine expansion.

Clayton Thomas-Muller, co-director of the Indigenous Tar Sands Campaign at the Polaris Institute in Ottawa and co-founder of Indigenous rights group Defenders of the Land, said the nationwide campaign still has its sights set on the grassroots.

"Our priority is to really put emphasis on regional struggles, front line struggles, to magnify the issues that are going on across the country." He said actions will also take place to increase awareness of the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and reconciliation for ongoing human rights violations.

Thomas-Muller said the campaign will bring together the fight against oil development all across the country, from the reversal of the Enbridge Line 9 pipeline to the proposed expansion of the TransCanada pipeline to mining from BC to Labrador.

"We will see intersections between Idle No More social media apparatus through the training initiatives we bring out, and of course, the ongoing campaigns being led by local grass roots and leadership."

The two groups produced an online training seminar that features organizers from across the country offering stories and advice to anyone looking to use direct action in their own region.

"There's a lot of people who have different agendas and movements for themselves," he said, adding that core values are still environmental protection, economic sustainability, particularly for First Nations people, land claims and human rights.

"I just know that in general that's the core goal, the protection of the environment, elevating economic sustainability of native people, and then again there's a lot of stuff going on in terms of land claims issues and human rights issues.

"It runs across a lot of these areas that have been neglected for a long time, and it seems that now that we've gotten organized, we're able to work on each one in a different way."

Danaan Dallas, an organizer with Idle No More in Vancouver, believes its long past time to abandon the court system.

"How often is the court process effective? It's a waste of time, effort and money."

He also sees the need to engage all Canadian, not just First Nations people, in the fight for environmental protection.

"If the government is not protecting the environment and the people, and the people aren't protecting themselves and they're leaving it up to the First Nations people to deal with it, it's little bit backward right now."

Dallas said the campaign is geared towards finding new ways to counter the federal government's environmental and Indigenous rights policies, adding that Idle No More has all by given up on coverage from the mainstream media.

"We've counted out the mainstream media so we're doing things through different channels. Social media networks, media from different communities, organizations are doing it for themselves."

Idle No More has partnered with Greenpeace Canada and the World Wildlife Federation among others.

At the end of the day, he said, it comes down to what individuals are willing to put into it. There is no overarching plan for action across the province.

Instead, it will be up to groups and individuals to take the initiative to create direct action. It's not a perfect solution, he said, but it's the last resort.

"If the people aren't going to care enough to do something about it, it's not going to work."

Dr. Gordon Christie, director of Indigenous Legal Studies at the University of British Columbia, isn't surprised Idle No More organizers are pushing a direct action mandate. He believes getting out of the courtroom and into the streets is the best available option now.

Christie used last year's omnibus bills, C-38 and C-45, as examples of the broken system. He says the government should have been required to consult First Nations before tabling the bills, not after.

In some court cases, Christie said, courts have recommended that the process by which the Crown is required to consult First Nations should kick in well before development on the land begins. But he's skeptical as to whether the law will ever change.

Right now, the best First Nations can hope for is to slow the process down to such a degree that it's unfeasible for companies to continue. The best bet is to amass enough support from people all across the country that demands can't be ignored any longer, he said.

"The next thing that happens needs to be that it explodes like it did in Quebec," he said, referring to the student tuition protest of last year. There was a key moment part way through the protests when it stopped being solely about students at a few universities and became about education in Canada at large.

"That was a real turning point," he said. "It wasn't just the students but it was all the large groups allied with the students. You need the numbers."

Ottawa fears admission it purposely destroyed Indian residential school files would lead to court fights: documents

APTN News
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Jorge Barrera

Despite holding evidence to the contrary within its archival vaults, the federal government refuses to admit it purposely destroyed Indian residential school

documents, fearing it could face additional legal action, internal government records show.

Indian residential school documents were pulped and incinerated as a result of three major rounds of government-wide document destruction directives issued between 1936 and 1973.

Yet, the federal government maintains that no residential school documents were ever purposely destroyed, but fell victim to floods and fires at the schools, according to an Aboriginal Affairs analysis obtained by the National Residential School Survivors' Society through the Access to Information Act.

"The government of Canada has taken the position that there was no deliberate destruction of student records and residential school documents and that documents were destroyed as a result of institutions that burnt down or were flooded," says a departmental analysis from 2009. "The admission of the deliberate destruction of student records and documents might spur further legal action against the government of Canada."

The analysis was triggered by a report from the National Residential School Survivors' Society, formed in 2003 to speak on behalf of residential school survivors, which took issue with the missing paper trails that left many residential school survivors receiving far less in compensation than they initially claimed because they couldn't prove how many years they actually attended the school.

Under the multi-billion dollar residential school settlement, $1.9 billion was set aside for "Common Experience Payments" which were based on the number of years former students attended the schools. A separate "Independent Assessment Process" was created to deal with compensation for abuse suffered at the schools.

The society recommended the government adopt a "reverse onus" policy where it would be up to the federal government to prove that the claimants didn't attend the schools during the claimed years.

The department concluded such a policy was fraught with problems for the department.

"Adopting the 'reverse onus policy' would imply that the destruction of documents was deliberately undertaken by the government of Canada," said the analysis. "Adopting a 'reverse onus' policy could have significant legal implications for the department, the Government of Canada, and it could set precedence for legal action against provincial governments and their involvement in their involvement in the administration of provincially run residential and day schools….There is no likelihood that the settlement agreement will be reopened in order to adopt this policy."

While it remains unclear exactly what impact the loss of the destroyed records will have on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's project to reconstruct and preserve the historical record, the ramifications have already been felt by residential school survivors under the CEP.

According to Aboriginal Affairs' own data, as of March 25, 51,188 residential school survivors have received compensation below what they claimed because their residence at a residential school could not be confirmed. The primary reason for this stems from a lack of existing documents. For example, a residential school survivor may claim they attended a certain school or schools for a number of years, but if only partial documentation exists, they would not be eligible for the full amount they claimed.

The Auditor General of Canada recently found that nearly three years after the TRC and Aboriginal Affairs began the process of finding and transferring historical Indian residential school records, no one knows how much it will cost to gather all the material, who will pay for it or what documents are even "relevant" for the project.

The report found that the TRC and the federal department couldn't agree on what constituted relevant documents, where to search, what time frames the documents would cover, what formats to use and who could pay for it all.

The TRC's mandate ends in July 2014.

The Library and Archives Canada estimates that the total cost of gathering historical Indian Residential School documents could hit at least $40 million and take 10 years to find and digitize all the material. The documents are scattered across 24 departments and agencies and, laid side by side, would stretch for about 20 kilometres or fill 69,000 boxes.

However, it appears the existing documents may be the remnants of a far more extensive historical record that has since been pulped or incinerated.

According to a 2006 report from The Shingwauk Project, based out of Algoma University in Sault Ste Marie, Ont., Ottawa purposely destroyed residential school records as part of government-wide purges.

The first round of document destruction occurred in 1936 to free up storage space, according to the report, which is based on archival documents. The then-named Indian Affairs department provided a list of documents it planned to destroy at certain times and which would be preserved. The residential school documents slated to be destroyed after five and 10 years included school returns, monthly reports, diaries, medical accounts, reports of inspectors, accidents and assistance to former students, according to the Shingwauk Project report.

The second round of document destruction came in 1944 as part of an effort to deal with a paper shortage created by the Second World War. The destroyed residential school documents included medical, hospital and drug accounts, monthly reports, diaries, salary pay lists and school returns along with requisitions.

The third round of document destruction came in 1954. The Indian Affairs department created "Records Destruction Teams" which obliterated a number of residential school records, including routine correspondence, memos to council, progress reports, repairs to buildings, all school supply correspondence, all health services correspondence, teacher's reports, admission and discharge among a host of other documents.

A moratorium on records destruction was put into place in 1973 as a result of an agreement between Public Archives of Canada and Indian Affairs.

First Nations, Canada urged to work on deal: 'Positive outcome is in the cards'

Winnipeg Free Press
May 2, 2013
Mia Rabson

OTTAWA -- There has never been a better time to develop a new deal for First Nations, a national think-tank said Wednesday.

But the MacDonald-Laurier Institute warned if a deal isn't made, the consequences could be dire.

The institute launched a three-year project to help Canadian and indigenous leaders develop a plan to make the economy and the natural-resources sector work for everyone.

Two new research papers were made public as part of the launch. The papers examine how such a plan would be feasible and study the severe downside of not implementing a plan.

Brian Lee Crowley, the managing director of the institute, said Canada is at a "crossroads."

"A positive outcome is in the cards but if we get it wrong, it could get very bad," he said.

Crowley and Ken Coates co-authored one of the two papers looking at some of the successful resource- and revenue-sharing agreements already signed, including in B.C. and Quebec, as examples of how the rest of the country should operate.

Retired Queen's University professor Douglas Bland looked at why conditions are ripe for indigenous uprisings and blockades, which could seriously damage the country and economy.

"Without reasonable shifts in both communities in the near future, a great deal might change for the worse for both First Nations people and for Canadians," he wrote.

For decades, First Nations have seen natural resources and the wealth they generate flow from their lands to the benefit of non-aboriginals, often harming the land and interfering with their traditional activities such as hunting and trapping. Add to that the rampant poverty and poor health that create a stark line between indigenous people and other Canadians, the fact governments have been reluctant to intervene in aboriginal demonstrations, and Canada's vast geography, and there is a possibility things could go south very quickly, wrote Bland.

"Unfortunately for Canada, the matrix of the economy, national resources and transportation is irreversibly vulnerable," writes Bland. "It presents targets that cannot be fully protected."

There is also what he calls a "warrior cohort" as the aboriginal population is, on average, much younger than the Canadian population as a whole. More than 40 per cent of First Nations people in the Prairies will be under the age of 30 within four years, compared to just 20 per cent of the non-aboriginal community. They face marginalization and discrimination.

"The challenge for Canadian and aboriginal leaders is to rescue today's aboriginal youth from the negative social effects of Canadian realities and the shortcomings of indigenous governments," said Bland. "At the same time, they must prevent conditions from disenfranchising future generations of First Nations youth. There is no either/or choice in this situation."

The opportunities to disrupt the Canadian economy are there, he said.

Bland said Winnipeg is particularly vulnerable because it relies on Shoal Lake for its water supply and the water is piped across First Nations land. The city, which is a transportation hub for the country, could also be a target because there are no "easy or cost-effective ways" to ship things via a different route.

Fight brewing about dam on aboriginal burial ground: Nova Scotia Power is planning safety upgrades

CBC News
May 1, 2013 8:48 PM AT



Ellen Hunt said the burial ground should be a recognized site. (Stephen Puddicombe/CBC)

First Nations people in Nova Scotia are trying to save an ancient burial ground from a proposed dam near Gaspereau Lake that could flood and destroy the 5,000–year-old site.

According to archeologists, the land around the lake near Kentville was used by Mi'kmaq ancestors to hunt and fish.

Nova Scotia Power owns the controversial land and is planning safety upgrades to the dam.

The utility said it doesn't have a final plan to reveal yet, but maintained it won't destroy any cultural significant sites.

"Really the reason for the upgrades is to avoid flooding in the area. It's to make sure when we have significant rain events we can release the water from the lake in

a controlled and safe fashion," said David McGregor, Nova Scotia's Power general manager for technical and construction services.

"There will be some water, but in the areas of cultural significance our excavators have worked with aboriginal people. We have managed to avoid those areas."

But the Annapolis Valley First Nation said the flooding will destroy artifacts that haven't been removed yet.

Elder Gerald Toney said it's gut-wrenching.

"If we as Mi'kmaq people got together and went digging up a graveyard or a heritage site of the French, the English or any other nationality and the feelings they would get from that is the same way we feel about it," he said.

"What they have done so far, all the stuff they have dug out of here, we want them back. Our ancestors made those things. We want to put up a heritage museum so we can display them to show our history."

Heritage Minister Leonard Preyra said the Special Places Protection Act is being followed at Gaspereau Lake to protect the cultural value of this site and Nova Scotia Power says it is following the act as well.

Mi'kmaq Burial Grounds Research and Restoration Association member Ellen Hunt said the burial ground should be a recognized site.

"I mean you have Louisburg, a French site that's protected. We have lived on this land many, many years before the French came here, why can't we have our heritage and our burial sites protected as well?"